



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

HAROLD A. SCHAITBERGER
General President

September 13, 2011

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
The United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
The United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Orrin Hatch
The United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Grassley, and Senator Hatch:

The International Association of Fire Fighters represents over 300,000 professional firefighters and paramedics across the nation. We are committed to providing our members the tools they need to do their jobs, improving their working conditions and safety, and fighting for adequate staffing, training, and equipment for those who dedicate their lives to keep others safe.

For these reasons, we write in support S. 968, the “Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act of 2011,” legislation that would strengthen U.S. law enforcement’s capacity to take action against foreign “rogue” websites that traffic in counterfeit and pirated products. These criminal sites threaten American jobs and local economies across the country.

While counterfeiting and content theft are not new, the proliferation and extent of these activities are unprecedented today. Criminals have turned to the Internet, abusing its virtually unlimited distribution opportunities to expand their illicit activities and profits. Many of these sites are based overseas, yet rely on U.S. Internet service providers, search engines, payment processors, and advertising services to reach U.S. consumers. Some rogue sites dupe Internet users into thinking they are legitimate, accepting major credit cards as forms of payment and featuring advertising from blue chip U.S. companies. And they are succeeding; a recent study found that just a small sample of 43 rogue sites generate over 53 billion visits a year.

The activities of infringers and counterfeiters are estimated to cost the global economy \$650 billion each year and have robbed 2.5 million jobs from G20 economies. At the local level cities make tough choices every day, and lost tax revenue means fewer police officers and firefighters. First responders ought not to have to worry about losing their jobs on account of foreign based criminals counterfeiting goods and deceiving U.S. consumers online.

Counterfeit products are often of inferior quality or outright harmful design, posing a serious threat to the health, safety, and wellbeing of our citizens and our first responders. The preparedness and safety of our members depend on sound, reliable equipment. Counterfeit batteries, gloves, brake pads, fire alarms, tourniquets, and fire extinguishers put us at risk. Counterfeit pharmaceuticals, tooth paste, and footwear put our seniors and our children at risk. Organized gangs that use the profits from counterfeit DVDs to feed other criminal enterprises put our country at risk.

We know what shared responsibility is. We live it every day. Every day, our members rely on each other as they confront dangerous situations, and the country depends on our members to promote public safety. This same sense of shared responsibility is essential if we are to effectively disrupt the rogue sites' business model. Law enforcement needs the authority to enlist the help of other players in the Internet ecosystem to cut these sites off from the American marketplace. Legislation targeting these foreign rogue websites will encourage Internet users to find legitimate sources for goods and content, will ensure that counterfeiters and pirates can no longer profit from this clearly illegal activity, and will stem the flow of dangerous counterfeit goods into the supply chains on which our members depend.

We are pleased that both the House and Senate have turned their attention to this major problem with the introduction of S. 968 in the Senate and the planned introduction of companion legislation in the House. We urge Congress to make the enactment of rogue site legislation a top priority this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Harold A. Schaitberger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Harold" being more prominent and the last name "Schaitberger" following in a similar style.

Harold A. Schaitberger
General President

cc: Majority Leader Harry Reid
 Minority Leader Mitch McConnell

